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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to determine the importance of parent involvement as perceived by beginning and experienced teachers. A review of the research yielded a wide range of school policies and classroom practices that influence student achievement; parental involvement was shown to be directly linked to student performance. An instrument was devised asking respondents to rank in importance 10 factors related to student achievement; demographic information was also elicited, including number of years in teaching. Data were obtained from 504 teachers employed in districts experiencing growth, since those districts are more likely to have beginning teachers on staff. Responses were arranged into groups according to respondents' years of experience: 1-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, and over 20. A mean score was obtained from each group; the data analysis indicated no significant differences between beginning teachers and other groups. The highest mean score was found in the 6-10 years of experience group suggesting that as teachers accumulate more years of experience, teacher perceptions of the importance of parent involvement decline steadily. (Author/LL)

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THE IMPORTANCE OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AS PERCEIVED BY BEGINNING TEACHERS VS. EXPERIENCED TEACHERS

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Abstract: The authors conducted the study to determine if beginning teachers perceived parent involvement as being less important to effective schools than did more experienced teachers. An instrument was devised asking respondents to rate effective schools characteristics, including parent involvement, on a 1-10 scale. Data were obtained from 504 teachers employed in districts experiencing growth, because those are the districts that are likely to have beginning teachers on staff. The responses were arranged into groups according to the respondents' years of experience: 1-5; 6-10; 11-15; 16-20; over 20. A mean score was obtained from each group, and the data analysis indicated no significant difference between the beginning teachers and other groups.

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Parent involvement is a term that has different meanings among professional educators. In spite of the disagreement on meaning, there is a general consensus that it is important as a variable in the development of effective schools. This study will attempt to determine the importance of parent involvement as perceived by beginning and experienced teachers.

Review of the Research

School improvement, its effects upon students and the learning process, has been a topic of debate for the past two decades. The debate has centered on the reasons why some schools are more successful that others in producing gains in student achievement (Purkey and Smith, 1983). In an era characterized by rising pressures to increase productivity in the schools, this issue continues to be an impetus for reform in American education. Researchers have analyzed a wide range of school policies and classroom practices to assess the relative importance of the different variables influencing student achievement. One variable that researchers found to be directly linked to student performance was parental involvement.

The critical role parents play in the development of their children's academic performance has been well-documented. In a comprehensive study, Walberg (1984) synthesized 2,525 studies of academic learning. Collectively, the various studies suggested that parents directly or indirectly influence elements of cognitive, affective, and behavioral learning. Using a nationally representative sample of American households, Baker and Stevenson (1987) found that parental involvement in school activities is related to the child's school performance, and that parents are more involved in school activities if the child is younger.

In a review of the research regarding the relationship between parental involvement and reading achievement, Silvern (1985) found that parental roles and practices promote reading readiness, receptivity to reading instruction, and increased achievement in reading. Research on compensatory education programs revealed that those programs which emphasized direct parent involvement were more effective that those that did not (Hawley et al, 1985). In comprehensive preschool programs, sustained parent involvement was associated with increased academic performance, regular school attendance, and decline in classroom behavior problems (United States Department of Education, 1989).

According to Lareau and Benson (1984), home/school partnerships are powerful devices for improving academic achievement as well as for giving parents a greater sense of "ownership" in their children's school. Based on the evidence that parental involvement has a positive effect on student learning, policymakers have taken initiatives to expand the parental role in federal programs. For example, in 1986, implementation of the Chapter 1 program required school districts to adopt a written policy on parental involvement, and in the 1988 reauthorization of Chapter 1, six goals for parental involvement were delineated. Accordingly, the Chapter 2 Block Grant Program and the 1988 Bilingual Education Act feature legislated types of parent involvement (United States Department of Education, 1989).

A study by Eisenhart (1988) focused on the attitudes teachers hold regarding which tasks in the school are legitimately seen as their responsibilities. The results revealed that teachers have positive attitudes toward those tasks that directly relate to instruction within the classroom. However, mixed or negative attitudes were noted for those tasks that do not directly pertain to instruction, such as obtaining support from parents. Such attitudes influenced the way teachers implemented educational policy. Epstein and Becker (1982) reported similar findings. Their research indicated that teachers have ambivalent feelings about the benefits of parental involvement in schooling. Their research also indicated that many teachers do not know how to implement an effective program of parent involvement. Only the most experienced teachers developed successful parent involvement strategies. Epstein and Becker (1982) found that lack of adequate administrative support was a deterrent to the efforts of teachers who might otherwise involve parents. Other research has shown that some teachers believe that parents, especially low income or minority parents, lack the interest and/or ability to help children (United States Department of Education, 1989).

There is some evidence to suggest that parents perceived their involvement in the educational process differently than do teachers. Case in point, in the 1988 Gallop Poll of the Public's Attitude Toward the Public Schools, only 25 percent of the parents surveyed felt that the schools put forth "a great deal or effort" to involve them. Data collected by Epstein (1986) revealed that parents feel that they could spend more time with their children if teachers would show them how and would provide them with learning activities to do at home. It appears that parental involvement is a variable that can directly and indirectly influence student achievement.

Origin, Design and Instrument

The project originated when the authors, both student teacher supervisors at Bloomsburg University (PA), shared the opinion that their student teachers might be lacking an appreciation of the importance of parental involvement. If such were the case, then the same attitude might persist into the beginning teaching years.

The question which guided the research was: Do beginning elementary teachers believe that parental involvement is less important for effective schools than experienced teachers?

The instrument used for gathering data asked respondents to rank in importance ten factors related to student achievement. The instrument

also asked for certain demographic data, including the number of years in teaching for each respondent. A final element of the instrument asked the respondents to add and rank any variable not mentioned. The instrument was piloted with elementary teachers and administrators.

The respondents were chosen from elementary schools experiencing growth in Eastern Pennsylvania. Growth districts were selected because those districts would provide more responses from beginning teachers.

Results

There was no significant difference when a t test was used to test the difference among the mean scores of the beginning teachers (1-5 years of experience) and the mean scores of teachers in four other groups (6-10 yrs., 11-15 yrs., 16-20 yrs., and over 20 yrs.). Table 1 illustrates the result of the t application.

The subject still seems a viable one for research, because the absence of significance may be due to the fact that the "Beginning" group included teachers with one to five years of experience. Perhaps a more fruitful way of investigating would be to limit the size of the "Beginning" group to teachers having only one and two years of experience. In effect, the present study may have found no significant differences because the "Beginning" group was contaminated by teachers with three to five years of experience who have been "inserviced" in the importance of parental involvement.

It is interesting to note the direction of the mean scores. The highest mean score is found in the 6-10 years of experience group. As teachers accumulate more years of experience, the mean scores related to teacher perceptions of the importance of parent involvement declined steadily.

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TABLE 1

ANALYSIS OF DATA: IMPORTANCE OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AS PERCEIVED BY BEGINNING VS. EXPERIENCED TEACHERS

Years of teaching experience	1 1-5	2 6-10	3 11-15	4 16-20	5 Over 20	t-test 1 vs. 2	1 vs. 3	1 vs. 4	1 vs. 5
Mean	5.72	6.4	6.25	5.75	5.37	NS	NS	NS	NS

S = significant at .05 level

NS = not significant at the .05 level

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